

Tiny Kentucky predator rediscovered

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Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

While most plants are rather docile, a few are actually quite predatory. Sundews (*Drosera spp.*) are carnivorous plants that survive by catching and digesting small insects that get stuck on sticky hairs that cover their leaf surfaces. They are small, annual plants and their seeds are dispersed by water. Sundews require bare, wet ground, such as the edges of ponds and swamps. They can also be found in road ruts and along animal trails.

This past field season, the spoon-leaved sundew (*Drosera intermedia*) was rediscovered in Russell County. This species had not been seen in Kentucky for well over 100 years. It is one of two species of sundew currently known from Kentucky. The other is dwarf sundew (*Drosera brevifolia*). Unlike some tropical carnivorous plants that can reach a height of eight feet, this sundew, at its best, extends about two inches above ground, exhibiting tiny, pale flowers. Usually, its small, reddish green leaves nearly touch the ground and blend in very nicely with its surroundings, thus making it difficult to spot. Biologists have intensely searched many acres of suitable habitat without finding sundews.

Continuous grazing, draining of wetlands and competition from exotic plant species (see *Know it before you grow it on*



The spoon-leaved sundew has been rediscovered in Russell County. Its reddish green leaves almost touch the ground making it blend with its surroundings. Photo provided by the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission

Pages 9-10) are probably the main factors affecting sundews. While not rare nationwide, both species of sundew in Kentucky are each known from only one population, many miles from the nearest known population outside of the state. The one population of dwarf sundew, which grows in old tire ruts in Pulaski County, has been protected by The Nature Conservancy. Thanks to the enthusiastic cooperation of the owner of the newly discovered sundew population, this site also will be managed and protected.



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